

Free State

The Free State is situated in the heart of South Africa surrounded by neighboring provinces and the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho. This region has been a bastion for Afrikaner nationalism and conservative culture since the establishment of the independent Republic of the Orange Free State back in the mid-1800s, and the progress of race relations tends to move at a slower pace than in the rest of the county.

The landscape throughout much of the province is flat, cultivated fields, which give way to the highveld of the Maluti Mountains in the northeastern part of the province. It is this expanse of rolling grassy hills and sandstone cliffs where the province's main attraction lies. The Golden Gate Highlands National Park is full of fantastic hiking trails, caves filled with San rock art, roaming wildlife, and fresh mountain air, making it an ideal spot for those who enjoy the outdoors.



CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS Free State

1 Golden Gate Highlands National Park – Hike the breathtaking mountains past herds of antelope and spectacularly colored geological formations (p360)

2 Bloemfontein – Explore the quirky city of Bloemfontein, including its inner city hilltop game reserve where you can walk among giraffes (p347)

3 Parys – Stand in the middle of the world's largest and oldest meteor impact site, which is home to rocks and plants that are found nowhere else in the world (p353)

4 Clarens – Poke through this small art town's huge array of wonderful and wonky galleries and shops, then settle in for a drink, live music and small town hospitality (p361)



HISTORY

Two billion years after a meteor struck the earth and forever shaped the land where the present day town of Parys now sits, indigenous nomadic Khoisan were joined by Sotho migrants from the north. Farmers and pastoralists, the Southern Sotho peoples spread across the region in numerous small chiefdoms until their lives were violently interrupted in the early 1800s.

Warfare between the Nguni kingdoms to the east, led by the famed Zulu King Shaka, spilled onto the highveld. At the same time, bands of Griqua and Kora raiders from the Cape Colony descended on the Orange River, seeking captives to sell as slaves to white settlers. As hostilities spread throughout the region, many Sotho fled into the hills for refuge. Under the able leadership of the great Moshoeshoe, they established a stronghold in the mountains and successfully fended off attacks from invaders and provided protection to weaker Sotho chiefdoms living in the lush Caledon River Valley.

In the wake of warfare, bands of Boer Voortrekkers expanded into the interior from the eastern Cape Colony as they

fled from the colonial British administration in the Great Trek of the 1830s and 40s. But as the Voortrekkers attempted to stake their claims to farmland in the highveld, they too came into conflict with raiding warriors as well as with Moshoeshoe's kingdom in the mountains. In 1854, the Boer frontiersmen declared an independent republic of the Orange Free State, named after the Orange River that forms its southern border. Yet bloody battles continued as they fought for territorial control. The Boer army waged two expansionist wars against the independent Sotho in 1858 and 1865, expanding the republic's boundaries into the Caledon River Valley. Sotho not driven into the mountains became subjugated as laborers for the Boer colonists.

Rising tension between the British and the Boer colonists came to a head in the South African War of 1899-1902. From their republics the Boers launched a preemptive strike, but soon felt the full force of the British Empire as almost half a

million British troops were brought in from abroad. British scorched-earth warfare proved devastating and ravaged

Boer farms throughout the province. With their homes burnt to the ground, Boer women and children were imprisoned in infamous British concentration camps such as the one outside of Harrismith, where thousands died of disease due to unsanitary conditions.

The harsh treatment of Boer women and children during the war had a lasting effect on the Boer psyche and provided a strong stimulus for the development of Afrikaner nationalism during the early part of the 20th century. But British victory meant the end of the independent

Boer republic in 1902 and the Orange Free State became part of the Union of South Africa in 1910.

Throughout the 20th century, the Orange Free State remained a bastion

for Afrikaner nationalism and conservative culture. Bloemfontein became the judicial capital of South Africa and a symbol of Afrikaner pride, but it was in the nearby township of Mangaung where prominent black leaders met in 1912 and forged the foundations of the African National Congress (ANC) to challenge rising racial discrimination. Yet the province remained the domain of white politicians and farmers who instituted some of the strictest apartheid laws in the country. The black population was forcibly removed from white-designated areas and into the newly fabricated "homelands" of QwaQwa, a tiny pocket of land between Harrismith and Clarens along the Lesotho and KwaZulu-Natal borders, and Bophutatswana, just outside of Bloemfontein. QwaQwa became home to nearly half a million Sotho who were deemed foreigners in their own country. With the end of apartheid, the "homelands" were incorporated back into South Africa and became part of the modern day Free State, which dropped the nominal "Orange" in the transition.

BLOEMFONTEIN

GPS: S 29 06.965 E 026 13.021

pop. 370,000 | elevation 1,385 m/4,544 ft

Bloemfontein is the Free State's largest city and capital as well as the judicial capital of the country. It is traditionally - and continues to be - a conservative city and stronghold of Afrikaner nationalism. Many people traveling through the country spend time in Bloemfontein only because of its central location on the N1 and substantial distance from other sizeable cities. Few consider Bloemfontein a tourist destination in its own right.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Mangaung Tourist Information - Main Office (S 29 07.184 E 026 12.416, 60 Park Rd, ☎051-405-8489, www.mangaung.co.za, 8am-4:15pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12pm Sat) has a free pocket-sized city map labeled with top sights and points of interest. While the map is helpful, this and a printout of a hundred accommodation options in the city is about all you're going to get at the Bloemfontein tourism office. The main bus station and an Internet café are located in the same building.

Mangaung Tourist Information - City Center Branch Office (S 29 07.136 E 026 12.881, cnr St George St & President Brand St, ☎051-412-7940, www.mangaung.co.za, 8am-4:15pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12pm Sat) also distributes the same free pocket-sized city map, although seemed incapable of providing any assistance other than the pocket map. A small coffee shop with Internet access is underway in the same building and was being built when we visited.

MONEY

Standard Bank (S 29 07.058 E 026 13.234, cnr Maitland St & West Burger St) has ATMs and a bureau de change.

ABSA Bank (S 29 07.058 E 026 13.320, cnr Maitland St & Church St) has ATMs and a bureau de change.

INTERNET

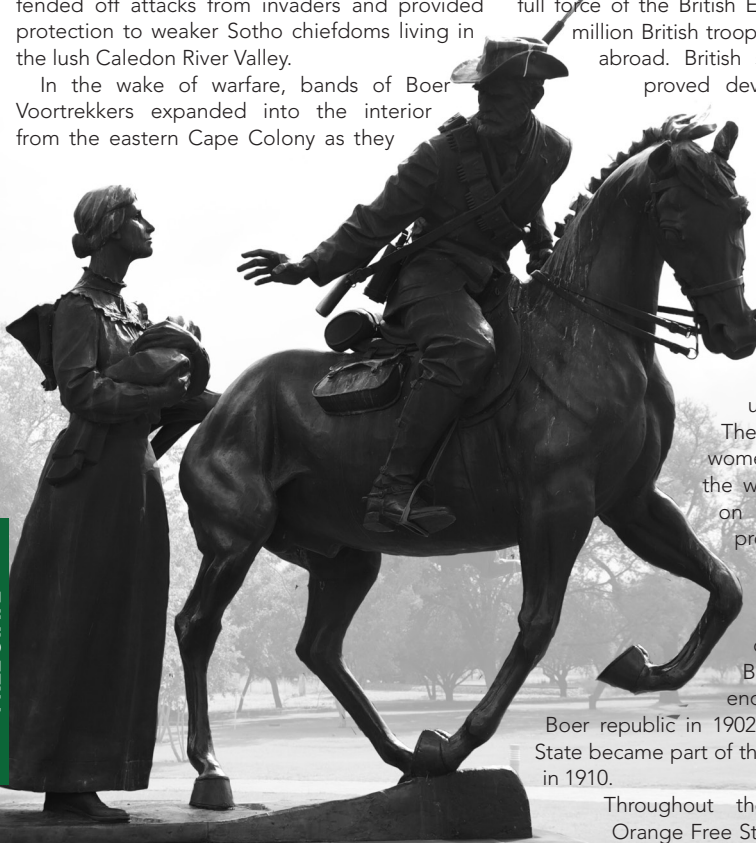
Easy Copy (S 29 06.846 E 026 12.640, Waterfront Mall, cnr Henry St & First Ave, ☎051-448-1315, 8am-5:30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat, 9:30am-12pm Sun, R7/10min) has three computers and a copy center.

Mr. Copy (S 29 07.192 E 026 12.436, 60 Park Rd, ☎051-430-2595, 7am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat, R10/15min) is located in the same building as the bus station and tourism office and has three computers for Internet use in addition to copying services.

SHOPPING

Waterfront Mall (S 29 06.846 E 026 12.640, cnr Henry St & First Ave) is the main downtown shopping center complete with a manmade pond and water fountain. There are a few restaurants with a view overlooking the water as well as a Woolworths, Pick 'n Pay, an Internet café and clothing and department stores.

Mimosa Mall (S 29 06.558 E 026 12.095, cnr Nelson Mandela Dr & General Dan Pienaar Dr, www.mimosamall.co.za) is Bloemfontein's other major shopping center with a Woolworths, Game, cinema, Standard Bank and ABSA bank, and a handful of department and clothing stores.



☀SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Mangaung Township, located just outside of Bloemfontein, is the famed birthplace of the African National Congress (ANC). In 1912, prominent black leaders gathered here and forged the foundations of what would eventually become the ruling party of the country. Among the founding members was Thomas Maphikela, and today the house where he once resided and the site of many pivotal meetings has been declared a national monument. Visits to the Mangaung Township and the Thomas Maphikela House can be arranged through the locally run tour company **Vuka Tours** (S 29 07.909 E 026 13.317, 62 Harvey Rd, ☎051-430-4422 or ☎082-972-5927, www.vukatours.co.za). Depending on your interest, tours may include meals at a local township restaurant or if you're up for some township nightlife, Vuka Tours can take you out drinking at the local shebeens.

Franklin Game Reserve (S 29 06.146 E 026 13.920, ☎051-405-8786, 8am-6pm, admission free) is conveniently located in the middle of the city atop Naval Hill. The game reserve has a main loop road and a number of hiking trails from parking sites, as well as some spectacular views of the city. There are a handful of giraffe and antelope roaming the park and visitors are allowed to walk around freely - just keep your distance from the occasionally aggressive wildebeest.

Oliewenhuis Art Museum (S 29 05.926 E 026 13.169, 16 Harry Smith St, ☎051-447-9609, www.nasmus.co.za, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 1pm-5pm Sun, admission free) has large permanent and temporary exhibits featuring South African works housed in a neo-Dutch style mansion and former state house. The exhibits on the main floor exclusively display works of South African artists, and an excavated underground reservoir built in the early 1900s has recently been restored to serve as a second gallery. Behind the museum and overlooking the gardens is The Terrace restaurant.

National Women's Memorial and Anglo-Boer War Museum (S 29 08.420 E 026 12.529, Monument Rd, ☎051-447-3447, www.anglo-boer.co.za, 8am-4:30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 11am-5pm Sun, adult R5, child R2) is a well curated museum with war memorabilia, photographs and displays on the British concentration camps that held Boer women and children, as well as prisoners of war. Particularly riveting are the displays on the

thousands of POWs that were shipped overseas to camps in St. Helena, Bermuda, Sri Lanka and India and then later repatriated back to South Africa.

National Museum (S 29 06.902 E 026 13.138, 36 Aliwal St, ☎051-447-9609, www.nasmus.co.za, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 12pm-5:30pm Sun, adult R5, child R3) is a natural history, culture and art museum with an extensive variety of exhibits ranging from dinosaur fossils, and displays explaining the development of the solar system, to the evolution of homo sapiens and the unfolding of the Anglo-Boer War.

Bloemfontein Zoo (S 29 06.811 E 026 12.396, Kings Park, Henry St, ☎051-405-8483, Oct-Mar: 8am-6pm, Apr-Sept: 8am-5pm, adult R26, child R11) has numerous animals on display in separate enclosures, including lions, tigers, elephants and wild dogs to name a few. When we visited they no longer had any ligers - the offspring of a male lion and female tiger.

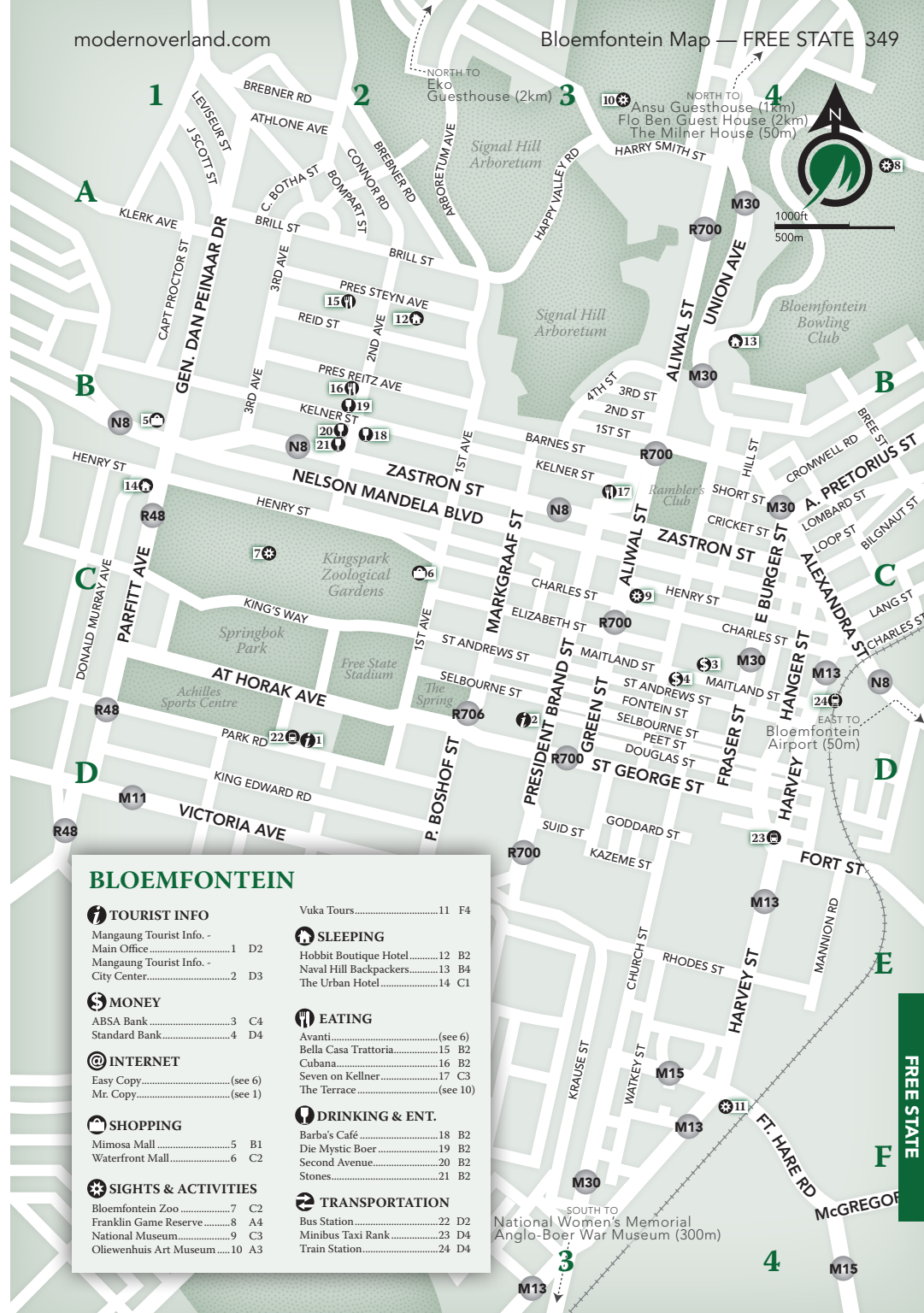
🛏SLEEPING

Bloemfontein has many accommodation options in the budget and mid-range category, but given the number of options that exist, finding a quality place to sleep isn't as easy as in many other cities.

BUDGET

Naval Hill Backpackers (S 29 06.386 E 026 13.410, 3 Delville Dr, ☎051-430-7266, www.navalhillbackpackers.co.za, camping R65, dm R110, d R280, Internet, parking) is located inside a converted water pump station originally built in 1896. The main space is divided to resemble township tin shacks, complete with cramped noisy living quarters and colorful graffiti coated walls. The place definitely has character, but hasn't won any awards for cleanliness.

Evergreen Accommodation (S 29 05.959 E 026 14.563, 108 Andries Pretorius St, ☎051-433-1494 or ☎082-269-0837, s R150-200, d R200-250) doesn't have a backpacker feel or much of an atmosphere, but it is far better than other surrounding budget options if you're just looking for a clean bed. There are simple en suite rooms with twin beds behind the main lodge and a basic kitchen that is available for use in the main building.



BLOEMFONTEIN

🗺 TOURIST INFO

- Mangaung Tourist Info. - 1 D2
- Main Office.....1 D2
- Mangaung Tourist Info. - City Center.....2 D3

💰 MONEY

- ABSA Bank.....3 C4
- Standard Bank.....4 D4

📶 INTERNET

- Easy Copy.....(see 6)
- Mr. Copy.....(see 1)

🛍 SHOPPING

- Mimosa Mall.....5 B1
- Waterfront Mall.....6 C2

☀ SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

- Bloemfontein Zoo.....7 C2
- Franklin Game Reserve.....8 A4
- National Museum.....9 C3
- Oliewenhuis Art Museum.....10 A3

- Vuka Tours.....11 F4

🛏 SLEEPING

- Hobbit Boutique Hotel.....12 B2
- Naval Hill Backpackers.....13 B4
- The Urban Hotel.....14 C1

🍴 EATING

- Avanti.....(see 6)
- Bella Casa Trattoria.....15 B2
- Cubana.....16 B2
- Seven on Kelner.....17 C3
- The Terrace.....(see 10)

🍷 DRINKING & ENT.

- Barba's Café.....18 B2
- Die Mystic Boer.....19 B2
- Second Avenue.....20 B2
- Stones.....21 B2

🚗 TRANSPORTATION

- Bus Station.....22 D2
- Minibus Taxi Rank.....23 D4
- Train Station.....24 D4

FREE STATE

FREE STATE

MID-RANGE

Ansu Guesthouse (S 29 05.419 E 026 13.946, 80 Waverley Rd, ☎051-436-4654, www.ansuguesthouse.co.za, s R450, d R500, 4-person cottage R600, secure parking, swimming pool) has a private en suite room and a comfortable 4-person self-catering cottage in a building beside the main residence. Both are decorated with clean and cozy linens and furniture. Overlooking the swimming pool is a small gazebo and braai area, and a tennis court graces the back yard. The guesthouse is within walking distance of a small shopping center with a few decent restaurants.

The Milner House (S 29 05.700 E 026 13.563, 15A Milner Rd, ☎051-436-0200, www.themilnerhouse.co.za, s R420, d R550, secure parking) is a newer Bloemfontein guesthouse with nine sleek rooms and a large two-story foyer. Each room has TV & AC and large bathrooms, and all upstairs rooms have balconies. Downstairs is a small but comfortable lounge and cocktail bar.

Eko Guesthouse (S 29 05.080 E 026 13.196, 10 Marquard Cres, ☎051-436-2056 or ☎082-337-9286, www.eko.co.za, s R400-500, d R550-650, secure parking) has just two soft and relatively private rooms, each en suite, with TV and AC. Both rooms have their own entrance and there is a pleasant ivy-laden patio and braai overlooking an expansive backyard garden.

Hobbit Boutique Hotel (S 29 06.349 E 026 12.667, 19 President Steyn Ave, ☎051-447-0663, www.hobbit.co.za, s/d R500-600, breakfast included, secure parking) was once a Mecca for J.R.R. Tolkien fans visiting from around the world. Opened

in 1993, the hotel still tries to maintain the fantasy established by the original owners through a lush garden, colorful bathtubs, and wood furniture with a certain old world charm. But sadly, the Tolkien Society of Bloemfontein has stopped its regular meetings at the hotel. The only real tie to the author now - other than the tributary name of the hotel - is the recent editions of *The Hobbit* that line the mantle.

TOP END

The Urban Hotel (S 29 06.691 E 026 12.084, cnr Parfitt Ave & Henry St, ☎051-444-3142, www.urbanhotel.co.za, s R620, d R720, breakfast included, wifi, secure parking), winner of the Free State Architectural Institute's "Top Architectural Design Hotel of 2009," is an ultra-modern hotel with 60 rooms, a lounge and a cocktail bar. The small stylish rooms are accented with bright graphic wall treatments and all have TV, AC and large bathrooms. The hotel is located near Mimosa Mall in a more recently developed part of the city.

Flo Ben Guest House (S 29 05.316 E 026 13.346, 3 Paul Roux St, ☎051-436-7453, www.floben.co.za, s R600, d R800, breakfast included, wifi, secure parking) is a 4-star guesthouse located in the residential neighborhood on the northern end of the city with five rooms, each with comfy traditional furnishings, TV and AC. The rooms open up to a large swimming pool beside a braai and lapa area, perfect for sundowners. Homemade dinners are also available upon request.

EATING

Seven on Kellner (S 29 06.702 E 026 13.124, 7 Kellner St, ☎051-447-7928, www.sevenonkellner.co.za, 12pm-2pm & 6pm-10pm Mon-Sat, mains R80-120) is one of the hippest restaurants in town. Set in a Victorian building with lush colors and dim lights, well-trained staff serve up fresh and flavorful food including oysters, perfectly cooked fillets and gourmet wood-fired pizza.

The Terrace (S 29 05.926 E 026 13.169, Oliewenhuis Art Museum, 16 Harry Smith St, ☎051-448-6834, www.theterracebloem.co.za/restaurant, 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun, mains R60-90) is located behind the Oliewenhuis Art Museum. The restaurant has indoor and outdoor seating and overlooks the museum's garden, one of the most beautiful sights in Bloemfontein. It has a large menu of primarily Mediterranean style dishes, a solid breakfast menu and fantastic quiche.

Bella Casa Trattoria (S 29 06.323 E 026 12.584, 31 President Steyn Ave, ☎051-448-9573, 12pm-late Mon-Sat, mains R50-80) is a surprisingly funky and comfortable Italian restaurant separated into several small, creatively decorated rooms. The kitchen serves up saucy handmade pasta and there is a wall-sized board full of daily specials. The terrace and attached bar are also lovely.

Avanti (S 29 06.846 E 026 12.640, Waterfront Mall, cnr Henry St & First Ave, ☎051-447-4198, www.avantirestaurant.co.za, 8:30am-10pm, mains R50-110) is a large two-story Italian restaurant and cocktail lounge that is fairly upmarket for being in the middle of a mall and has the best view of the shopping center's pond. Besides the standard pizza and pasta pickings, there is a good selection of seafood. The atmosphere flips from restaurant to cocktail lounge on weekend evenings.

Cubana (S 29 06.490 E 026 12.554, cnr Second Ave & President Reitz Ave, ☎051-447-1920, www.cubana.co.za, 8am-late Sun-Fri, 12pm-late Sat, mains R40-100) is a Latin style lounge and restaurant with plush sofas, a wall of hookahs and a cocktail list almost as long as the food menu. It's a good place for brunch, which is served until 2pm, but even better for some Cuban appetizers and a caipirinha.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Die Mystic Boer (S 29 06.543 E 026 12.508, 84 Kellner St, ☎051-430-2206, www.diemysticboer.co.za, 2pm-late Mon-Sat, 6pm-12am Sun) is a nice foil to the Second Avenue scene with its alternative and punk clientele and indie rock music. The venue sprawls through a series of rooms and has two bars, a pool table, fireplace and an outdoor deck. The bar also serves a full food menu with some great wood-fired pizza.

Barba's Café (S 29 06.597 E 026 12.547, 16 Second Ave, ☎051-430-2542, 4pm-late Sat-Thu, 12:30pm-late Fri) is the see-and-be-seen spot on Second Avenue for the twenty-something crowd. There is table seating on the covered outdoor terrace where drinks and light meals are served. Inside, the large bar gives partygoers enough liquid courage to fire up the dance floor as DJs spin. Wednesday nights boast half-price buckets of booze - in other words, cocktails as big as your head.

Stones (S 29 06.608 E 026 12.522, cnr Second Ave & Zastron St, ☎051-486-6584, www.stones.co.za, 12pm-4am Mon-Sat) is a popular student bar. On weekends the place is packed, both on the ground level and the upper deck, with a young crowd out to party hardy.

Second Avenue (S 29 06.572 E 026 12.530, Second Ave, ☎051-448-3088, 12pm-late, mains R25-R50) is a little rough around the edges, but the drinks are cheap and there's no need to dress to impress or worry about anyone judging you as you guzzle a beer. They also serve inexpensive pub meals during the day.

TRANSPORTATION**Air**

Bloemfontein Airport – BFN (S 29 05.740 E 026 17.859, off of Alexandra Ave/N8, ☎051-407-2240, www.acsa.co.za) is serviced by **Mango Airlines** (☎086-116-2646, www.flymango.com) and **South Africa Airways** (☎011-978-1000, www.flysaa.com) with daily flights to Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban and Port Elizabeth.

Train

Train Station (S 29 07.119 E 026 13.577, Harvey Rd) has passenger service through **Shosholozza Meyl** (☎086-000-8888, www.shosholozzameyl.co.za) with

economy class running daily to Johannesburg (R50-70) and Port Elizabeth (R70), twice per week to Kimberley (R60), and once a week to Durban (R80) and Cape Town (R210). Tourist class trains (with sleeping and restaurant cars) run less frequently with service to Johannesburg (R110) and Port Elizabeth (R170) twice per week, and Durban (R190), Pietermaritzburg (R160), Kimberley (R70) and Cape Town (R300) once a week.

🚗 Car Rental

Around About Cars (021-422-4022, www.aroundaboutcars.com) is a budget car agent can make a booking for you at one of the major national car rental companies. By booking through Around About Cars you get a better price and better insurance coverage than you would if you make a reservation directly with the rental company.

Avis (S 29 05.740 E 026 17.859, Bloemfontein Airport, Off of Alexandra Ave/N8, 051-433-2331 or 086-102-1111, www.avis.co.za).

Tempest (S 29 05.740 E 026 17.859, Bloemfontein Airport, Off of Alexandra Ave/N8, 051-433-2146, www.tempestcarhire.co.za).

Hertz (S 29 05.740 E 026 17.859, Bloemfontein Airport, Off of Alexandra Ave/N8, 051-400-2100, www.hertz.co.za).

First Car Rental (S 29 05.740 E 026 17.859, Bloemfontein Airport, Off of Alexandra Ave/N8, 051-430-0390, www.firstcarrental.co.za).

🚌 Bus

Bus Station (S 29 07.181 E 026 12.397, 60 Park Rd) has ticketing offices for all the major bus lines including **Translux/City to City** (086-158-9282 or 051-408-4888, www.translux.co.za), **Greyhound** (021-418-4326, www.greyhound.co.za), **Intercape** (086-128-7287, www.intercape.co.za), and **SA Roadlink** (011-333-2223, www.saroadlink.co.za). To view the time schedules and prices of all of the above bus companies for any specific route check out **Computicket** (083-915-8000, www.computicket.com/web/bus/tickets). You can book online or by calling them.

🚐 Minibus Taxi

Minibus Taxi Rank (S 29 07.401 E 026 13.578, cnr Fort St & Power St) isn't extremely busy as most people opt for the more comfortable and similarly priced long distance buses that depart from downtown. It is located near the local minibus taxi rank and has transport to Joburg (R150), Kimberly (R70) and Maseru (R70). To get to Durban via minibus you must first catch a minibus to QwaQwa (R130) and from there to Durban (R140).

GETTING AROUND

🚖 Taxi

T&M Taxis (051-430-9999 or 072-174-5015) has taxi service around the city.



NORTHERN FREE STATE

Something magical happens when you reach the northern part of the Free State. The endless stretch of farmland begins to transform subtly at first; the soft hills become steeper, the colors of the land deeper and the temperature drops, so that soon, distant peaks are blanketed in mist. For the intrepid traveler, these interminable distances between isolated towns seem like just another way to keep these hills' secrets - fantastical rock formations to climb, pristine rivers to raft and quiet cozy restaurants to pass an evening or a week.

PARYS

GPS: S 26 54.104 E 027 27.479
pop. 370,000 | elevation 1,398 m/4,587 ft

This lovely town's location along the Vaal River inspired its founders to name it Parys, after the French city on the Seine. While Parys never quite reached the fame or reputation of its sister city, there is much to appreciate about this refuge from the miles of farmland and bush of the northern Free State. Downtown Parys is a burgeoning destination for craft and antique hunters, and the surrounding area is rife with natural wonders. Most remarkable of this is the nearby Vredefort Dome, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the largest meteorite point of impact in the world.

🗺️ TOURIST INFORMATION

Parys Tourist Information (S 26 53.969 E 027 27.636, 30 Water St, 056-811-4000, www.parys.info, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat-Sun) sells a comprehensive city map and brochure with information on places to stay and eat within the city and surrounding area.

💰 MONEY

ABSA Bank (S 26 53.992 E 027 27.326, cnr Kerk St & Middel St) has an ATM and foreign exchange services.





PARYS

- T** **TOURIST INFO**
Parys Tourist Info.....1 B4
- \$** **MONEY**
ABSA Bank.....2 B3
Standard Bank.....3 C3
- @** **INTERNET**
Telefoon Den.....4 C3
- *** **SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**
Dome Bookings & Real Adv.....5 B3
- S** **SLEEPING**
Dorps House.....6 B3
Hotel Le Petit Chateau.....7 B2
- F** **EATING**
Bus Stop.....8 C2
Feast.....9 B3
O's Restaurant.....10 B2
Plum Tree.....11 B3
- D** **DRINKING & ENT.**
Pickled Pig Pub & Pie House.....12 B3
- T** **TRANSPORTATION**
Local Minibus Taxi Rank.....13 B3
Sasol Filling Station.....14 C3
Minibus Taxi Rank.....(see 4)

Vredefort Dome

The Vredefort Dome, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005, is the oldest and largest meteorite impact site in the world. At 2 billion years old and 300 km wide, the formation is a truly spectacular site, but hard to wrap your mind around when you first view it. From Parys, you can see two sets of mountain ridges in a semicircle surrounding the Vaal Valley. These are the geological formations created upon the meteor's impact, and the valley you are viewing it from is the point of impact itself. The 10-kilometer-wide meteor is believed to have hit the earth at a speed of 30,000 kilometers per hour, forcing rock layers downwards. When the earth rebounded, other layers of the earth were forced up to form the inner rim of the mountains. Because of the impact, rocks around the Dome area have very rare characteristics. Look out for the black striations that marble many of the rocks in the area – these dark spots are much like volcanic rock, but were created from the incredible heat from the meteor's impact. A lot of the area's geological formations also look like they've been shattered, which in fact they were as they rebounded and rose to create the mountains you see today. The impact also pushed up reefs of gold, which are still mined, 4 km beneath the earth's surface.

While it's possible to explore the Vredefort Dome area on foot and in your own vehicle, this is one of the few times you might be better off taking a tour. There are more than 100 km of roads, some in good condition and some not, that take you along the mountainous ridges of the dome. Local accredited guides will be able to help you hone in on the most compelling of Vredefort's sights and explain their geological and cultural significance better than any brochures you can pick up in the area. If you are planning a trip round the dome, here are three registered guides you can try:

Francois De Villiers at Dome Adventures (072-185-4900, www.domeadventures.co.za, R120/2hr, R220/half day, R275/full day) offers tours in the dome as well as extreme sports activities in the area. Tours focus on the geological heritage and combine both hiking and driving and include gold mines and ghost towns. Be sure to reserve at least two days in advance.

Christo Meyer at Kopjeskraal Country Lodge (S 26 52.858 E 027 23.157, *Kopjeskraal turnoff from the R53, 083-406-0841 or 056-818-1585, www.kopjeskraal.co.za) does guided 4x4 tours (2.5hr, R150/person) and trail walks (2hr, R100/person).*

Jan Fourie with Dome Impact Tours (056-811-2078 or 082-891-7163, jan.fourie@parys.co.za, R450/person with vehicle, R350/person without) starts off his 8hr tour with a PowerPoint presentation explaining the geological and cultural history of the dome, then takes visitors to 13 sights in the area and provides a picnic lunch.

Standard Bank (S 26 54.055 E 027 27.391, *cnr Mare St & Middel St*) also has full banking services.

@ INTERNET

Telefoon Den (S 26 54.114 E 027 27.486, 59B Dolf St, 056-817-2103, www.telden.ipcweb.com, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-12pm Sat, R1.50/min) has seven computers, as well as printing and communication services. Laptop connection is not allowed.

SHOPPING

The main shopping area in Parys is on Bree Street and Water Street, where you'll find antique stores and one-off craft boutiques. The corner of Bree Street and Middel Street has several antique and vintage shops.

* SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Dome Adventure Festival (early November, 056-811-4000, www.domefest.co.za) celebrates outdoor activities of all kinds. Athletes and sports enthusiasts gather here each year to play golf, kayak, river raft, quad bike, fly fish and dragon boat race. The town fills with stalls full of gifts, food and drinks, and there is even a Mr. & Miss Dome crowned each year.

IMPACT! The Dell Cheetah Centre (S 26 50.379 E 027 30.826, Vaal Eden Rd, 073-148-6245, www.dccafrica.co.za, 9am-4pm by appointment) is a cheetah breeding and reintroduction project dedicated to stabilizing cheetah populations in South Africa and educating the public about these magnificent cats. Visitors can come any day of the week to learn about cheetahs and pet the center's tame cats (R100). On Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, you can also watch the cats run (R400 for cheetah run & petting). If you can't get enough

FREE STATE

FREE STATE

of these big felines, visit the center's website to learn more about their volunteer program, where guests can live and work among the cheetahs for two weeks or more.

Otter's Haunt (S 26 54.536 E 027 25.704, Kopjeskraal Rd, ☎056-818-1814 www.otters.co.za, half-day R325/person) can arrange river rafting and canoeing trips.

Game drives in open vehicles to see lions, crocodiles and more than a dozen species of antelope are available in both the morning and evening in the area. Arrange drives through **Imbali Routes & Tours** (S 27 00.118 E 027 22.422, 27 Voortrekker St, Vrededorp, ☎056-931-0034, www.imbalitours.co.za, R225) or **Jabulani Game Lodge** (turnoff S 27 04.821 E 027 09.489, Off the R59, ☎082-873-2291, www.jabulanigame.co.za, R150).

Dome Bookings & Real Adventures (S 26 53.991 E 027 27.256, Bree St, ☎072-749-8169, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat, 8am-1pm Sun) can arrange accommodation and activities for Parys and the surrounds.

☑EATING

O's Restaurant (S 26 53.793 E 027 27.190, 1 de Villiers St, ☎056-811-3683, www.osrestaurant.co.za, 11am-10pm Wed-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun, mains R60-150) is an enchanted hideaway in a house along the river. Pass through O's gates and you'll find a wild garden with tables secluded among the trees and overlooking the river. Inside, a roaring fire and cozily separated dining rooms keep things intimate. Contemporary classics served here are hearty and inviting - dishes made from locally raised beef are particularly succulent. **Feast** (S 26 53.882 E 027 27.358, Bree St & Philip St, 8am-6pm Tue-Wed, 8am-10pm Thu-Sat, 8am-5pm Sun, mains R40-80) is a sleek and summery café that feels just a little too cool for Parys. Artfully prepared entrées and light meals are served in a set of monochromatic rooms and on the garden patio. Feast impresses with presentation and even simple cappuccinos taste just a bit better here.

Bus Stop (S 26 54.178 E 027 26.875, Van Coller St, ☎083-375-5023, 9am-6pm Wed-Sun, mains R30-42) does wonders with winter vegetables and soups. Savory pancakes and home baked pies with gravy are an absolute delight. And the dining room, a collection of old school buses, adds whimsy to the mouthwatering fare.

Plum Tree (S 26 53.995 E 027 27.263, Bree St, ☎056-817-7814, mains R40-55) is an artsy coffee shop that serves satisfying fare. When seated, you get an old Afrikaans magazine from early South Africa to peruse. This also happens to be one of the few independent restaurants in town that is open on a Monday.

☑SLEEPING

At the time of review, there were no backpackers in Parys and budget accommodation was hard to come by. However, there are a number of reasonably priced guesthouses and B&Bs.

MID-RANGE

Bushcamp (S 26 50.379 E 027 30.826, Vaal Eden Rd, ☎072-749-8169, R220/person) is a campground operated by the Dell Cheetah Centre that is beautifully situated along the river a few kilometers outside of town. While somewhat isolated, the site has luxury tents with beds, linens, and battery operated lights, fully stocked outdoor kitchens, running water, showers, a fire pit and flushing toilets soon to be installed. Firewood is provided; guests need only to bring their own food and pillows. Swimming is possible along the river, but watch out for the large catfish.

Dorps House (S 26 53.966 E 027 27.512, 5 Oranje St, ☎072-749-8169, R250/person) is a self-catering house in the middle of the city that doesn't look like much from the outside. Once inside, however, you'll be surprised by the spacious rooms and classical furnishings that are a steal for the price. The house has two beds, two bathrooms, a living room with television, a full kitchen and a quiet backyard, all homey and clean.

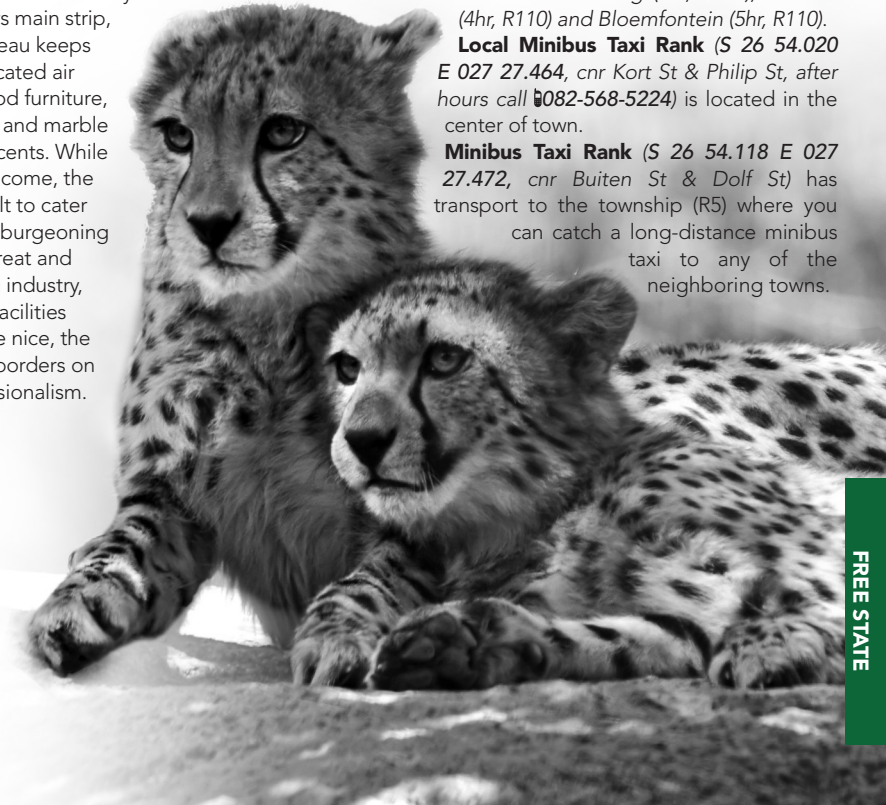
Otter's Haunt (S 26 54.536 E 027 25.704, Kopjeskraal Rd, ☎056-818-1814, www.otters.co.za, bush cabins s R400-420, d R640, 4-person R980, Internet, secure parking, swimming pool) is a rustic and cozy homestead 2 km outside of town that has all the delights of summer camp but with the perks of more grownup accommodation. A-frame thatched cabins are secluded and have their own private fire pit, self-catering open-air kitchen and bathroom huts nearby. The two-bedroom self-catering Guineafowl Cottage (s R320-R45, d R490) is cozy and quaint, and has its own bathroom and television. The River House (R1,280-3,200), which has its own pool and can accommodate up to 10

people, overlooks a small footbridge to an island in the middle of the Vaal River. Otter's Haunt also arranges rafting and canoeing trips.

TOP END

IMPACT The Dell (S 26 50.379 E 027 30.826, Vaal Eden Rd, camping: R200 plus R50/person, chalets: s R300, d R600, 4-person R1,100, 8-person R1,600, parking, swimming pool) has self-catering chalets decked out in African style set along the river a few kilometers outside of town. Chalets have lovely water views but the real show is on the complex's wide lawn, where grazing ostriches, goats and sheep wander. The Dell also has a Cheetah Centre, where cheetah cubs are bred to be reintroduced to the wild.

Hotel Le Petit Chateau (S 26 53.864, E 027 27.204, Boom St, ☎082-647-0444, s R350, d R700, breakfast included, Internet, secure parking) is a new addition to the Parys hotel scene and one of your best options if you're looking for convenience and class. Just a block away from the Parys main strip, Le Petit Chateau keeps up a sophisticated air with dark wood furniture, downy linens and marble floors and accents. While anyone is welcome, the hotel was built to cater to the town's burgeoning executive retreat and teambuilding industry, so while the facilities here are quite nice, the atmosphere borders on sterile professionalism.



☑DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

The cafés along Bree Street often stay open for a pint or two, especially on Friday and Saturday nights. Note that because of a city ordinance, pubs and bars must close on Sunday night.

Pickled Pig Pub & Pie House (S 26 53.971 E 027 27.252, Bree St, ☎082-928 4742, 11am-9pm Mon-Thu, 10am-late Fri-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) is a charming British-style pub in the heart of town.

☑TRANSPORTATION

☑Bus

Sasol Filling Station (S 26 54.271 E 027 26.979, Bree St) is the bus stop location for **Translux/City to City** (☎086-158-9282, www.translux.co.za), which offers long distance bus services to surrounding areas. Tickets can be bought at **Shoprite** (S 26 53.973 E 027 27.455, Philip St). Main routes include Johannesburg (3hr, R110), Pretoria (4hr, R110) and Bloemfontein (5hr, R110).

Local Minibus Taxi Rank (S 26 54.020 E 027 27.464, cnr Kort St & Philip St, after hours call ☎082-568-5224) is located in the center of town.

Minibus Taxi Rank (S 26 54.118 E 027 27.472, cnr Buiten St & Dolf St) has transport to the township (R5) where you can catch a long-distance minibus taxi to any of the neighboring towns.



EASTERN HIGHLANDS

The Eastern Highlands are the picturesque mountainous region of the Free State that hugs the northern Lesotho border. This area attracts more visitors to the Free State than any other part of the province with its small town charm, snow capped mountains, stunning natural scenery, collection of San rock art sites and pristine hiking trails.

HARRISMITH

GPS: S 28 16.186 E 029 07.513
pop. 70,000 | elevation 1,641 m/5,384 ft

Harrismith gets a decent amount of visitor traffic, as it is the fork in the road where the N5 to Bloemfontein branches off from the Johannesburg-Durban N3 artery. Unfortunately for Harrismith, the vast majority of the travelers who do stop never come into the city but instead gather at the Bergview 1 Stop center just off the N3 outside of town where there is fuel, restaurants, shops, ATMs, a playground, tourist information office and hotel. If you do come into town there is a pleasant central square with most of what you'll need within easy walking distance.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Be forewarned there are tourist information signs throughout the downtown pointing to the non-existent Harrismith Tourist Information Office that was formerly located in the Town Hall but closed over a year ago.

Route Information Center (S 28 15.335 E 029 07.000, Bergview 1 Stop, Warden St exit off N3, 080-063-4357, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) is run by the N3 Toll Concession and is the closest thing to a tourist information office available around Harrismith. It has maps, brochures for area accommodation and activities, as well as a small gift shop.

@Coffee (S 28 16.381 E 029 07.568, Shop 4 Dales Center, Murray St, 073-499-5805, 8:30am-

4:30pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-1pm Sat) is a small coffee shop with a tourist information board containing brochures for accommodation and sights within Harrismith and the surrounding area.

MONEY

Standard Bank (S 28 16.155 E 029 07.533, Town Square, Sarel Cilliers St) has ATMs and full banking services.

Bergview 1 Stop (S 28 15.299 E 029 06.970, Warden St exit off N3) has ATMs for Standard Bank, FNB and Nedbank.

INTERNET

JCH Telecom & Computers (S 28 16.250 E 029 07.647, Piet Retief St, 058-622-1899, www.jchtelecom.co.za, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat, R10/30min) has four updated computers and allows laptops to be connected. They also sell computers and have a computer repair service.

Juicy Lucy (S 28 15.299 E 029 06.970, Bergview 1 Stop, Warden St exit off N3, 058-623-0255) has wifi available.

SHOPPING

Bergview 1 Stop (S 28 15.299 E 029 06.970, Warden St exit off N3) has a handful of stores including **The Guinea Fowl** (058-622-1083 or 082-829-5199, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat, 9am-5pm Sun), where you can pick up choice biltong and raw honey products. **Classic Country** (058-622-2890 or 083-333-6043, 8:30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-1pm Sat, 10:30am-3:30pm Sun) has a pretty and prim selection of home décor and handmade soaps and candles.

SLEEPING

Harrismith International Backpackers (S 28 16.125 E 029 07.768, 44 Piet Retief St, 058-623-0007, dm R80, d R180) is run out of a family home with a double private room and a dorm in freestanding buildings beside the house. This place doesn't tend to get very busy and there isn't much of an area to lounge around apart from the

room, but it is a fine place to stay.

Amadudu Guesthouse (S 28 16.603 E 029 08.571, 1 Bosbok Ave, 058-622-1335 or 083-991-7717, www.amadudu.co.za, s R330 d R530-600, breakfast included, secure parking) is a pleasant guesthouse located in a residential suburb with five individually decorated rooms. Inside the main house are four rooms with a spacious living room and open kitchen. There is also a self-catering room with a full kitchen that has a private entrance in a separate building beside the main house.

Pringles Mountainview Inn (S 28 15.315 E 029 06.939, Bergview 1 Stop, Warden St exit off N3, 058-623-0255, www.bergviewpringles.co.za, s R330, d R480) is located off to the side of the Bergview 1 Stop center just off of the N3 with a few rows of standard rooms, each with two double beds, TV and AC. It is rather characterless but perfect if you're just looking for a place to stop and sleep. It has all of the conveniences right next door with restaurants and a few small shops.

EATING

The Daily Grind Coffee Shop (S 28 16.201 E 029 07.615, Stuart St, 058-622-2701, 8am-4:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12:30pm Sat, mains R35-45) has a great local vibe and is the perfect downtown location to enjoy a meal or stop for a drink. It serves a full menu of wholesome food that can be enjoyed inside or on the sidewalk tables.

@Coffee (S 28 16.381 E 029 07.568, Shop 4 Dales Center, Murray St, 073-499-5805, 8:30am-4:30pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-1pm Sat, light meals R15-30) is a little coffee shop serving muffins, quiche and waffles. The coffee shop also doubles as a small bookstore and tourist information office.

Heike's Place (S 28 15.315 E 029 06.939, Bergview 1 Stop, Warden St exit off N3, 058-622-3446, 7am-3pm Mon-Sat, 9am-3pm Sun, mains R20-45) is a locally owned coffee shop and restaurant serving breakfast and light meals. It has outdoor garden seating in back and a small specialty foods shop inside, mostly featuring rusks (dry biscuits) and jam.

Teak Table (S 28 15.286 E 029 06.965, Bergview 1 Stop, Warden St exit off N3, 058-623-1640, 7am-9pm Mon-Sat, 7:30am-5pm Sun, mains R50-90) has sizeable steaks and standard fare, a full bar and a large screen for viewing the occasional rugby game. Nothing fancy, but the joint can be fun on game night.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Krom Boom (S 28 16.152 E 029 07.568, 41A Stuart St, ☎073-184-4344, 11am-late Mon-Sat) is the place to be in town for the younger crowd. You can bring your own meat in for a braai or buy meat from the bar and catch sports games on the big screen. At night the bar nudges patrons onto the dance floor with a smoke & bubble machine.

Legends Sportsmans Pub & Grill (S 28 16.004 E 029 07.339, Warden St, 10am-late Mon-Sat) is another Harrismith watering hole where locals gather for entertainment in front of a few TVs and a fireplace. They also serve pub food.

TRANSPORTATION

Bus

Excel Filling Station (S 28 16.022 E 029 07.343, Warden St) serves as the bus stop for **Greyhound** (☎083-915-9000, www.greyhound.co.za) and **City Liner** (☎083-915-9000, www.citiliner.co.za). Bus tickets can be purchased online, via phone or at the **Shoprite** (S 28 16.138 E 029 07.486, Bester St) downtown across from the Town Square.

Bergview 1 Stop (S 28 15.349 E 029 06.916, Warden St exit off N3) is the bus stop location for **Intercity** (☎011-855-7865, www.intercity.co.za).

GOLDEN GATE

HIGHLANDS NATIONAL PARK

GPS: S 28 30.080 E 028 34.747
elevation 1,823 m/5,981 ft

Golden Gate Highlands National Park (S 28 30.080 E 028 34.747, N712, ☎058-255-000, www.sanparks.org/parks/golden_gate/, adult R88, child R44) is just 20 km east of Clarens and one of the Free State's most fantastic sights. Its moniker comes from the two cliffs within the park that face each other and glow a rich gold at

sunset. While hikers and nature lovers can spend days among the complex rock formations and expansive grasslands of Golden Gate without tiring of its beauty, the short drive on the N712 that cuts through the heart of the park is just enough to get a taste of the park's rich historical and geological significance. The 200-million-year-old rocky overhangs still bear the primitive rock paintings from Khoisan bushmen who took shelter in the area, and during the Anglo-Boer wars. Warmer months paint the park rainbow with flowers, while winter blankets the landscape with snow, but most anytime of the year a thin veil of mist provides some camouflage for the wildebeest, eland, oribi and zebra that roam here.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Main Tourism Office (S 28 30.171 E 028 35.028, N712) can provide hiking maps and additional park information to visitors.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Ribbok hiking trail (S 28 30.350 E 028 37.054), a two-day, one-night trail to the top of beautiful Brandwag Buttress, is the most popular of the park's multitude of hiking paths and dirt road drives. The trail ascends Brandwag from the Glen Reenen rest camp and passes remarkable rock formations and a bucolic stream, while at the rock's apex hikers have views all the

way to Lesotho. The overnight accommodation at Ribbok Hut includes bunk beds, a braai and a bathroom. Advanced booking is necessary (☎058-255-0000, www.sanparks.org/parks/golden_gate/, R105/person).

The Basotho Cultural Village (S 28 29.327 E 028 44.627, off the N712, ☎058-721-0300, Basotho@sac.fs.gov.za, 8am-4:30pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-5pm Sat-Sun, tour: adult R50, child R30) is a small Sotho "show village" where actors in costume perform traditional daily village activities as visitors are guided through the village. The site also has a restaurant that serves authentic Sotho food. Visitors can take a guided hike to learn about medicinal and other indigenous plants in the area (adult R50, child R25) or stay overnight at one of the village's rondavels (s/d R525). The reception office of the village also doubles as a gift store and money from the purchases of gifts go back to crafters in real Sotho communities.

SLEEPING

All accommodations in the park are administered by the national park service. For questions and reservations for the below accommodations, contact ☎058-255-0000 or www.sanparks.org/parks/golden_gate/.

Golden Gate Hotel (S 28 30.340 E 028 36.534, N712, s/d R725-850, Internet, parking) is by far the swankiest accommodation in the park. A recent revamp and rename of the former Brandwag Hotel included ultramodern decor and an upscale restaurant and bar. Many rooms look straight onto some of the park's most beautiful rock formations.

Glen Reenen Rest Camp (S 28 30.350 E 028 37.054) is the park's most popular stopover. In addition to accommodation, there is an onsite convenience store and gas station. Camping (R135-140) is available with or without electricity. Rondavels and longdavels for two or four people (R540-580) have beds, a bathroom, braai, TV and kitchen. Family cottages (R600-940) can accommodate between four and six people with similar amenities plus a fireplace. There is also a farmhouse that provides the same amenities as a cottage for the same price.

Highlands Mountain Retreat Rest Camp (S 28 29.100 E 028 40.746, R870-1,430) has log

cottages that can accommodate four people, with multiple bathrooms and bedrooms, fireplaces and self-catering kitchens.

Basotho Cultural Village Rest Camp (S 28 29.327 E 028 44.627, s/d R525) has two to four-person en suite rondavels with kitchens and braais.

CLARENS

GPS: S 28 30.845 E 028 25.257
pop. 4,000 | elevation 1,813 m/5,948 ft

Nestled in the breathtaking Maluti Mountains, the little country village of Clarens is a delightful surprise for adventurers and art lovers alike. Pastoral cottages and the charming art galleries that splinter off from the village square are dusted with snow in winter and are often blanketed with mist even in mid-summer. The nearby Golden Gate National Park and surrounding landscape offer limitless pursuits for extreme sport junkies, but it's the cosmopolitan array of accommodations and restaurants in Clarens that have attracted celebrities such as Prince Harry and Brad Pitt while en route to Lesotho on goodwill missions.

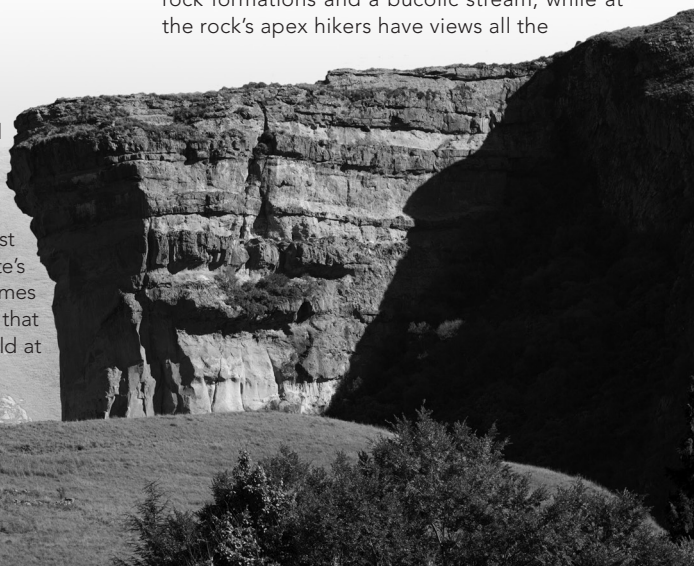
TOURIST INFORMATION

Clarens Tourism (S 28 30.956 E 028 25.263, 61 Market St, ☎058-256-1813, www.clarenstourism.co.za, 8:30am-4:30pm Wed-Mon) is located on the second floor of the shopping center on Market Street. The office has very few brochures or information on area activities, but it does double as a boutique for locally made goods.

Mountain Odyssey (S 28 30.838 E 028 25.301, Main St, ☎082-654-9989, www.infoclarens.com, 9am-5pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 9am-1pm Tue & Thu, 9am-2pm Sat, 9am-12pm Sun) can arrange a host of activities and accommodations, and staff is extremely helpful and friendly if you need general information about the area.

MONEY

Clarens Country Mart (S 28 30.834 E 028 25.284, Main St) has ABSA, FNB and Standard Bank ATMs. **Standard Bank** (S 28 30.959 E 028 25.201) also has an ATM in the middle of Main Street.



INTERNET

Ta Wonders Computer Solutions (S 28 30.832 E 028 25.258, 254 Van Zyl St, ☎074-237-0377, 8:30am-6pm, R10/15min) is located inside a tattooing and graphic design studio. It has just a couple of computers and connections for laptops.

SHOPPING

Clarens is made for curious shoppers. You can easily spend a day poking through eclectic antique stores and boutiques in town, as well as high end galleries and craft shops. The most well known of these fine art galleries are probably the **Johan Smith Art Gallery** (S 28 30.844 E 028 25.311, Windmill Center, Main St, ☎058-256-1620, www.johansmith.co.za, 8am-4:30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat, 8am-3pm Sun) and the **Blou Donki** (S 28 30.844 E 028 25.311, Windmill Center, Main St, ☎058-256-1757, 8:30am-4:30pm Mon, Wed & Thu, 8:30am-5pm Fri-Sat, 8:30am-3pm Sun), which can be found on the right-hand side as you enter town, just before you hit the village square.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Clarens is an up-and-coming destination for adventurers of all kinds. For a full list of all the activities available in the area, drop by **Mountain Odyssey** (S 28 30.838 E 028 25.301, Main St, ☎082-654-9989, www.infoclarens.com, 9am-5pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 9am-1pm Tue-Thu, 9am-2pm Sat, 9am-12pm Sun), which can make arrangements for you directly. One of their most popular activities is river rafting with Grade III-V rapids trips for groups of 4 adults or more (half day R400/person, full day R600/person). They can also arrange horseback riding at Clarens Stables near Golden Gate National Park (2hr, R250).

Clarens Brewery (S 28 30.956 E 028 25.263, Market St, ☎082-901-4700, www.clarensbrewery.co.za, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) is a small microbrewery featuring beers and ciders. Visitors can drop by for a free tasting and stay for a pint of stout, cider or one of the brewery's lighter ales. When the weather chills, the brewery offers hot cider as well.

Fly-fishing is a popular pastime in the area. For rentals and guides, contact **Stafford Botha** (☎082-863-7003) or **Garth Brooke** (☎082-459-

9621) for individual quotes.

Clarensxtreme (☎058-256-1260, www.clarensxtreme.co.za) and **Bergwoning Adventures** (☎082-336-3088, www.bergwoning.co.za) are favorites of adrenalin junkies for their abseiling and quad rides. Clarensxtreme also does paintballing and Bergwoning has horseback riding. Call for current rates.

SLEEPING

BUDGET

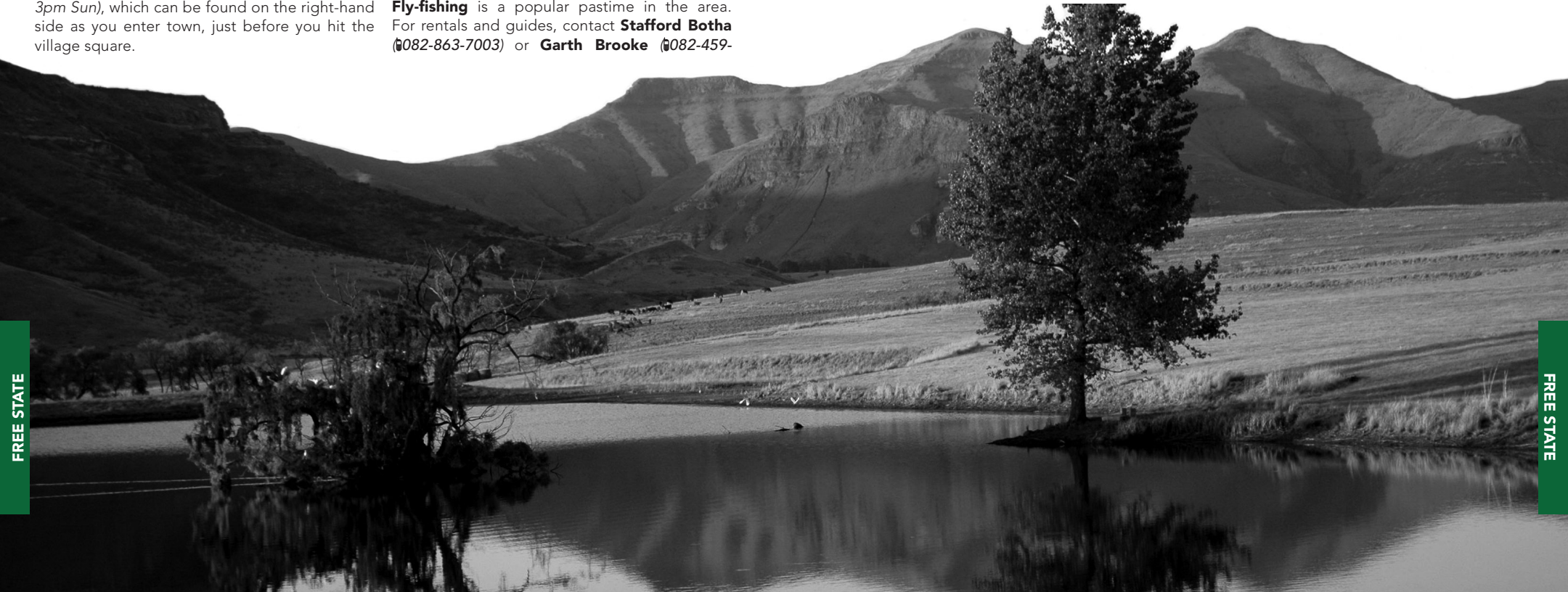
Clarens Inn & Backpackers (S 28 30.959 E 028 24.758, Van Reenen St, ☎058-256-1119, camping R60, luxury teepee/tent R80, dm R100, apt R150-200/person, parking) is down a dirt road just outside of town and is a playground for grownups to relive fond summer camp memories. Choose from a bed in a bunkhouse, a teepee or en suite room with fireplace. Everything about this place is rustic and outdoorsy, with a

main open-air lounge, and a bar and braai area decorated with hubcaps. All guests have access to the self-catering kitchen and common areas, but if you're looking for slightly more put together accommodation, ask for the "honeymoon suite" or the "Streamer," a self-catering cottage near the river.

MID-RANGE

IMPACT Aspen Guest House (S 28 30.747 E 028 25.080, Berg St & Van Zyl St, ☎058-256-1192 or ☎082-577-2232, s R250-400, d R500-700, parking) has five comfortable and homey rooms with individual themes and atmospheres based on the arts. The common area has a library of books to enjoy by a roaring fire and breakfast is served in bed. The guesthouse is just outside of town on a large plot of land next to the mountainside and is powered by solar energy.

Ash River Lodge B&B (S 28 31.210 E 028 25.215, 723 Van Reenen St, ☎058-256-1717, s R400, d R660, breakfast included, wifi, secure parking) is



on a rise above Clarens with breathtaking views of the surrounding mountains and valley that guests can enjoy from their neat rooms or from the expansive deck.

TOP END

Lake Clarens Guest House (S 28 30.706 E 028 25.369, *Lake Clarens Dr*, ☎058-256-1436, www.lakeclarensgh.co.za, s R550 d R1,100, *breakfast included, wifi, parking*) is a cozy set of rooms and self-catering suites that have all the snug comforts of home with a touch of old-world elegance. The guesthouse is within walking distance from the center of town, but once inside it's easy to imagine you're far in the countryside because most rooms overlook a pond and grazing horses. Lake Clarens has gained the reputation of being one of the nicest guesthouses in town and has hosted celebrities passing through, including Brad Pitt, who stayed in Room 2.

RiverWalk B&B (S 28 30.680 E 028 25.282, 387 *Church St*, ☎058-256-1420, riverwalk.clarens@yahoo.com, s R480, d R860, *breakfast included, parking*) is a refreshingly modern change from the fussy Victorian guesthouses that abound in Clarens. The six spacious and immaculate guest rooms have a beautiful view of the surrounding mountains and the willow-lined river just in front of the house. Breakfasts are a bountiful affair here and each room has under-floor heating for chilly nights and is stocked with its own bottle of sherry.

EATING

Clementines Restaurant (S 28 30.828 E 028 25.209, *cnr Church St & Van Zyl St*, ☎058-256-1616, 10am-3pm & 6pm-late Tue-Fri, 10am-3pm & 6pm-late Sat-Sun, *mains R65-120*) is located in a converted barn just a block away from Clarens' main square. Homemade country favorites get a gourmet bent in this romantic dining room loaded with rustic charm. For melt-in-your-mouth comfort food, try the chicken potpie.

Café Moulin Restaurant & Bakery (S 28 30.945 E 028 25.219, *Main St*, ☎082-690-1382, 8am-5pm Tue-Thu, 8am-9pm Sat, *mains R40-70*) pulls together a choice array of French favorites in a small whitewashed dining room that stays cozy in the winter with a wood burning fireplace. This is one of the few spots in town where you can have more than boerewors and

eggs for breakfast, and Saturday dinners feature gourmet pizzas and pastas.

Highlander Restaurant (S 28 30.947 E 028 25.249, *Market St*, ☎058-256-1912, 7:30am-10:30pm, *mains R30-80*) is a family restaurant that locals earmark as one of their favorite eateries in town for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The long menu of hearty country favorites caters to most every taste and inclination and the restaurant fills up at night with those who want a pint to go with their savory pie.

The Post House Restaurant (S 28 30.931 E 028 25.203, *Main St*, ☎058-256-1534, 7:30am-9pm, *mains R30-70*) has a host of homey basics and a popular breakfast. Picnic tables in a courtyard just off the village square make this a pleasant people watching spot.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Street Café & Restaurant (S 28 30.950 E 028 25.210, *Main St*, ☎058-256-1651, 10am-9pm) is a popular pub that has a wide porch and a cozy wood bar with a roaring fire. The restaurant also serves up hearty favorites. Head over anytime on weekend days for live music.

Friends Restaurant (S 28 30.827 E 028 25.253, *cnr Church St & Van Zyl St*, ☎058-256-1912, 11:30am-2:30pm & 6pm-9:30pm, *pub 11am-late Tue-Sun*) is a favored gathering spot any night of the week, but gets especially packed on Friday and Saturday nights when it brings in live music. They also serve food.

The Grouse & Claret (S 28 30.841 E 028 25.277, *cnr Van Zyl St & Main St*, ☎058-256-1795, 9am-10pm) is a centrally located pub that is as popular with families as it is with bikers. It's often a hot spot for live music and a solid fallback option for a hearty meal and a drink.

TRANSPORTATION

There are no major bus lines or minibus taxis that go in or out of town. **Clarens Shuttle Tours & Transfers** (☎058-256-1173 or ☎084-625-7273, clarensshuttlesFT@hotmail.com) offers a shuttle service to and from Clarens from major cities, but you have to arrange travel at least two days in advance. Clarens to Johannesburg is R350 and to Lesotho R180.

Rustler's Valley

Until 2007, the rugged and lovely Rustler's Valley drew artists, ravers and hippies together as South Africa's New Age Mecca. Unfortunately, a devastating fire in 2007 decimated the area, and neither the valley nor its freewheeling spirit has recovered. While plans are in the works for its restoration, there is no word yet on when or if it will be restored to its former glory.

FICKSBURG

GPS: S 28 52.218 E 027 52.578

pop. 30,000 | elevation 1,601 m/5,253 ft

The small border town of Ficksburg calls itself the "Gateway to the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho," and true enough, many travelers pass through en route to Lesotho. But every November, Ficksburg leads a regional transformation into a cherry lover's dream as tens of thousands of visitors pick, eat and buy fruit-inspired goods at the Cherry Festival. In addition to cherries, Ficksburg is known for its asparagus and its historically notable sandstone buildings. The town and surrounding area are particularly beautiful in April, when the pink Cosmos flowers bloom.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Imperani Tourism & Training Center (S 28 52.388 E 027 52.232, *Lang St*, ☎051-933-2130, www.ficksburg.org.za, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) can help you get a handle on the basics of Ficksburg and can provide maps of the cherry route.

MONEY

ABSA (S 28 52.271 E 027 52.369, *cnr McCabe St & Voortrekker St*) has full banking services on the town's main thoroughfare.

INTERNET

@Office (S 28 52.290 E 027 52.505, *cnr Voortrekker St & Piet Retief St*, ☎051-933-2727, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8:30am-1pm Sat, R9/15min) has three computers and offers laptop connectivity.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The Cherry Festival (*late November*) briefly puts the sleepy border town of Ficksburg on the map for tens of thousands of sweet-toothed revelers each year. This region produces the majority of South Africa's cherries. During harvest time, visitors can take their pick from cherry farms in the area and shop at the cherry-themed markets that open up in town. Show grounds are arranged specially for the festival, where you can try your hand at sheep herding, cherry pit spitting or camel riding.

Tempelhof Game Farm (S 28 45.813 E 027 54.100, *off R70*, ☎051-933-3973, www.tempelhof-ficksburg.co.za, *visits by appointment, entrance R20, game drive R20*) allows visitors to view game and offers daily game drives every morning and night. The park is home to cheetahs, lions, ostriches, zebras and 20 varieties of antelope. Visitors can picnic near the lion and cheetah enclosures and play with lion cubs or feed monkeys.

The White Mischief (S 28 52.527 E 027 50.077, *off the R26*, ☎082-920-5551 or ☎082-798-5052, www.thewhitemischief.co.za, *entrance R20, boat ride R95, food à la carte*) is a cigar boat that floats down the Meulspuit Dam and through the Thaba Sediba private nature reserve. Try to spot the more than 15 species of animals while you have dinner, sip a cocktail or puff on a cherry cigar.

Sandstone Estates has a private collection of steam locomotives and vintage agricultural equipment on a working farm (*contact Hester Dietrichsen*, ☎083-200-0014, www.sandstone-estates.com, 9am-12pm & 1pm-4pm, *half day R300/2 people and R100/additional person, full day R500/2 people and R100/ additional person*). The estate boasts the largest collection of privately owned, narrow-gauge locomotives in the world and the longest privately owned, narrow-gauge railway in the world.

All Saints Anglican Church (S 28 52.427 E 027 52.686, *Voortrekker St*) is perhaps the town's best example of the beautiful sandstone architecture built in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This church, just behind the town square, was created from unbaked mud bricks and the colored glass windows were formed by a local artist by gluing colored glass from broken bottles, dishes and stemware onto normal glass to create unique pieces of stained glass art. Take a quick cruise around Ficksburg to see some of the other similarly constructed buildings, which include the Old Post Office and the Town Hall.

SHOPPING

Ficksburg is by no means a shopper's haven, but you'll find the essentials at the shops surrounding the village square and on nearby Kestell Street.

Spar (S 28 52.376 E 027 52.545, Voortrekker St) is in the center of town for fresh groceries.

SLEEPING

Imperani Guest House (S 28 52.390 E 027 52.283, 53 Mc Cabe St, 051-933-3606, www.imperaniguesthouse.co.za, s R265-350 d R490-880, breakfast included, Internet, secure parking, swimming pool) is a haven for weary travelers right on Ficksburg's main drag. Quiet guest rooms, set back from the street, have beds with lusciously soft linens and electric blankets for chilly nights. The rooms and grounds are neat as a pin and the onsite pool and decent restaurant are rare luxuries in this area. Note that room rates are slightly higher during the week.

Bella Rosa (S 28 52.409 E 027 52.365, 21 Bloem St, 051-933-2623, s R330 d R460-480, mains R70-100, parking) is a lovely English cottage in a residential area a few blocks from the town square. The guesthouse has 12 rooms, each comfortably furnished with antiques. It also has a pub, which opens for guests and the public on demand, and a restaurant that serves home-cooked roasts and gourmet vegetarian dishes with advanced notice.

Woodpecker Guesthouse (S 28 51.970 E 027 52.979, 4 Kort St, 051-933-6180, s R240-360, d R430-450, breakfast included, Internet/wifi, secure parking, swimming pool) has 12 pristinely kept, pretty rooms in a large guesthouse surrounded by neat gardens.

Highlands Hotel (S 28 52.345 E 027 52.47, Voortrekker St, 051-933-2214, www.highlands-hotel.co.za, backpackers: s R160 d R230, hotel: s R210, d R350, parking) in the center of town is looking a bit worn at the heels but it's the best (or the only) budget option in the area. Backpackers rooms are barebones and share bathrooms but still offer the privacy of a hotel room. Regular rooms aren't much of a step up, but are en suite and have their own television sets.

EATING

Imperani Restaurant & Coffee Shop (S 28 52.390 E 027 52.283, 53 McCabe St, 051-933-3606, www.imperaniguesthouse.co.za, 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun, mains R30-70) is one of few restaurants in town, so good thing the food here is homemade and delicious. The fairly limited menu covers the usual ground for breakfast, lunch and light meals, but glance toward the specials blackboard for the best of the countryside's hearty and fresh fare.

Bottling Co. (S 28 52.280 E 027 52.508, Piet Retief St, 051-933-2404, 11am-10pm Mon-Sat, mains R40-90) may be Ficksburg's most popular restaurant and bar. Its wide menu of hearty dishes include chicken bakes, steaks and curries that cater to just about every taste.

Bella Rosa (S 28 52.409 E 027 52.365, 21 Bloem St, 051-933-2623, s R330 d R460-480, mains R70-100) is a guesthouse with a restaurant open to the public that serves home-cooked roasts and gourmet vegetarian dishes with advanced notice. While not quite a set menu, the chef generally prepares hearty

country fare with fresh local ingredients so there is usually only one dish available each night.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Bottling Co. (S 28 52.280 E 027 52.508, Piet Retief St, 051-933-2404, 11am-10pm Mon-Sat) is the only pub in town with regular hours. It's also one of the best restaurants in the area.

Bella Rosa (S 28 52.409 E 027 52.365, 21 Bloem St, 051-933-2623) is a guesthouse and restaurant with a pub that opens by demand of locals and visitors alike. The bar only opens when there are enough people interested, so call ahead to find out if the taps are flowing.

TRANSPORTATION

Minibus Taxi Rank (S 28 52.388 E 027 52.232, Lang St, 051-933-2447) is in front of the tourism information office and has transport locally as well as to Bethlehem (R40-50), Bloemfontein (R70-90), QwaQwa (R60-75) and Durban (R190).